

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



THE LIFE AND LIES OF ALBUS DUMBLEDORE

The sun was coming up: The pure, colorless vastness of the sky stretched over him, indifferent to him and his suffering. Harry sat down in the tent entrance and took a deep breath of clean air. Simply to be alive to watch the sun rise over the sparkling snowy hillside ought to have been the greatest treasure on earth, yet he could not appreciate it: His senses had been spiked by the calamity of losing his wand. He looked out over a valley blanketed in snow, distant church bells chiming through the glittering silence.

Without realizing it, he was digging his fingers into his arms as if he were trying to resist physical pain. He had spilled his own blood more times than he could count; he had lost all the bones in his right arm once; this journey had already given him scars to his chest and forearm to join those on his hand and forehead, but never, until this moment, had he felt himself to be fatally weakened, vulnerable, and naked, as though the best part of his magical power had been torn from him. He knew exactly what Hermione would say if he expressed any of this: The wand is only as good as the wizard. But she was wrong, his case was different. She had not felt the wand spin like the needle of a compass and shoot golden flames at his enemy. He had lost the protection of the twin cores, and only now that it was gone did he realize how much he had been counting upon it.

He pulled the pieces of the broken wand out of his pocket and, without looking at them, tucked them away in Hagrid's pouch around his neck. The pouch was now too full of broken and useless objects to take any more. Harry's hand brushed the old Snitch through the moleskin and for a moment he had to fight the temptation to pull it out and throw it away. Impenetrable, unhelpful, useless, like everything else Dumbledore had left behind —

And his fury at Dumbledore broke over him now like lava, scorching him inside, wiping out every other feeling. Out of sheer desperation they had talked themselves into believing that Godric's Hollow held answers, convinced themselves that they were supposed to go back, that it was all part of some secret path laid out for them by Dumbledore; but there was no map, no plan. Dumbledore had left them to grope in the darkness, to wrestle with unknown and undreamed-of terrors, alone and unaided: Nothing was explained, nothing was given freely, they had no sword, and now, Harry had no wand. And he had dropped the photograph of the thief, and it would surely be easy now for Voldemort to find out who he was. . . . Voldemort had all the information now. . . .

"Harry?"

Hermione looked frightened that he might curse her with her own wand. Her face streaked with tears, she crouched down beside him, two cups of tea trembling in her hands and something bulky under her arm.

"Thanks," he said, taking one of the cups.

"Do you mind if I talk to you?"

"No," he said because he did not want to hurt her feelings.

"Harry, you wanted to know who that man in the picture was. Well . . . I've got the book."

Timidly she pushed it onto his lap, a pristine copy of *The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore*.

"Where — how — ?"

"It was in Bathilda's sitting room, just lying there. . . . This note was sticking out of the top of it."

Hermione read the few lines of spiky, acid-green writing aloud.

“Dear Batty, Thanks for your help. Here’s a copy of the book, hope you like it. You said everything, even if you don’t remember it. Rita.” I think it must have arrived while the real Bathilda was alive, but perhaps she wasn’t in any fit state to read it?”

“No, she probably wasn’t.”

Harry looked down upon Dumbledore’s face and experienced a surge of savage pleasure: Now he would know all the things that Dumbledore had never thought it worth telling him, whether Dumbledore wanted him to or not.

“You’re still really angry at me, aren’t you?” said Hermione; he looked up to see fresh tears leaking out of her eyes, and knew that his anger must have shown in his face.

“No,” he said quietly. “No, Hermione, I know it was an accident. You were trying to get us out of there alive, and you were incredible. I’d be dead if you hadn’t been there to help me.”

He tried to return her watery smile, then turned his attention to the book. Its spine was stiff; it had clearly never been opened before. He riffled through the pages, looking for photographs. He came across the one he sought almost at once, the young Dumbledore and his handsome companion, roaring with laughter at some long-forgotten joke. Harry dropped his eyes to the caption.

Albus Dumbledore, shortly after his mother’s death, with his friend
Gellert Grindelwald.

Harry gaped at the last word for several long moments. Grindelwald. His friend Grindelwald. He looked sideways at Hermione, who was still contemplating the name as though she could not believe her eyes. Slowly she looked up at Harry.

“Grindelwald?”

Ignoring the remainder of the photographs, Harry searched the pages around them for a recurrence of that fatal name. He soon discovered it and read greedily, but became lost: It was necessary to go further back to make sense of it all, and eventually he found himself at the start of a chapter entitled

“The Greater Good.” Together, he and Hermione started to read:

Now approaching his eighteenth birthday, Dumbledore left Hogwarts in a blaze of glory — Head Boy, Prefect, Winner of the Barnabus Finkley Prize for Exceptional Spell-Casting, British Youth Representative to the Wizengamot, Gold Medal-Winner for Ground-Breaking Contribution to the International Alchemical Conference in Cairo. Dumbledore intended, next, to take a Grand Tour with Elphias “Dogbreath” Doge, the dim-witted but devoted sidekick he had picked up at school.

The two young men were staying at the Leaky Cauldron in London, preparing to depart for Greece the following morning, when an owl arrived bearing news of Dumbledore’s mother’s death. “Dogbreath” Doge, who refused to be interviewed for this book, has given the public his own sentimental version of what happened next. He represents Kendra’s death as a tragic blow, and Dumbledore’s decision to give up his expedition as an act of noble self-sacrifice.

Certainly Dumbledore returned to Godric’s Hollow at once, supposedly to “care” for his younger brother and sister. But how much care did he actually give them?

“He were a head case, that Aberforth,” says Enid Smeek, whose family lived on the outskirts of Godric’s Hollow at that time. “Ran wild. ’Course, with his mum and dad gone you’d have felt sorry for him, only he kept chucking goat dung at my head. I don’t think Albus was fussed about him, I never saw them together, anyway.”

So what was Albus doing, if not comforting his wild young brother? The answer, it seems, is ensuring the continued imprisonment of his sister. For, though her first jailer had died, there was no change in the pitiful condition of Ariana Dumbledore. Her very existence continued to be known only to those few outsiders who, like “Dogbreath” Doge, could be counted upon to believe in the story of her “ill health.”

Another such easily satisfied friend of the family was Bathilda Bagshot, the celebrated magical historian who has lived in Godric’s Hollow for many years. Kendra, of course, had rebuffed Bathilda when

she first attempted to welcome the family to the village. Several years later, however, the author sent an owl to Albus at Hogwarts, having been favorably impressed by his paper on trans-species transformation in *Transfiguration Today*. This initial contact led to acquaintance with the entire Dumbledore family. At the time of Kendra's death, Bathilda was the only person in Godric's Hollow who was on speaking terms with Dumbledore's mother.

Unfortunately, the brilliance that Bathilda exhibited earlier in her life has now dimmed. "The fire's lit, but the cauldron's empty," as Ivor Dillonsby put it to me, or, in Enid Smeek's slightly earthier phrase, "She's nutty as squirrel poo." Nevertheless, a combination of tried-and-tested reporting techniques enabled me to extract enough nuggets of hard fact to string together the whole scandalous story.

Like the rest of the Wizarding world, Bathilda puts Kendra's premature death down to a backfiring charm, a story repeated by Albus and Aberforth in later years. Bathilda also parrots the family line on Ariana, calling her "frail" and "delicate." On one subject, however, Bathilda is well worth the effort I put into procuring Veritaserum, for she, and she alone, knows the full story of the best-kept secret of Albus Dumbledore's life. Now revealed for the first time, it calls into question everything that his admirers believed of Dumbledore: his supposed hatred of the Dark Arts, his opposition to the oppression of Muggles, even his devotion to his own family.

The very same summer that Dumbledore went home to Godric's Hollow, now an orphan and head of the family, Bathilda Bagshot agreed to accept into her home her great-nephew, Gellert Grindelwald.

The name of Grindelwald is justly famous: In a list of Most Dangerous Dark Wizards of All Time, he would miss out on the top spot only because You-Know-Who arrived, a generation later, to steal his crown. As Grindelwald never extended his campaign of terror to Britain, however, the details of his rise to power are not widely known here.

Educated at Durmstrang, a school famous even then for its unfortunate

tolerance of the Dark Arts, Grindelwald showed himself quite as precociously brilliant as Dumbledore. Rather than channel his abilities into the attainment of awards and prizes, however, Gellert Grindelwald devoted himself to other pursuits. At sixteen years old, even Durmstrang felt it could no longer turn a blind eye to the twisted experiments of Gellert Grindelwald, and he was expelled.

Hitherto, all that has been known of Grindelwald's next movements is that he "traveled abroad for some months." It can now be revealed that Grindelwald chose to visit his great-aunt in Godric's Hollow, and that there, intensely shocking though it will be for many to hear it, he struck up a close friendship with none other than Albus Dumbledore.

"He seemed a charming boy to me," babbles Bathilda, "whatever he became later. Naturally I introduced him to poor Albus, who was missing the company of lads his own age. The boys took to each other at once."

They certainly did. Bathilda shows me a letter, kept by her, that Albus Dumbledore sent Gellert Grindelwald in the dead of night.

"Yes, even after they'd spent all day in discussion — both such brilliant young boys, they got on like a cauldron on fire — I'd sometimes hear an owl tapping at Gellert's bedroom window, delivering a letter from Albus! An idea would have struck him, and he had to let Gellert know immediately!"

And what ideas they were. Profoundly shocking though Albus Dumbledore's fans will find it, here are the thoughts of their seventeen-year-old hero, as relayed to his new best friend. (A copy of the original letter may be seen on page 463.)

Gellert —

Your point about Wizard dominance being FOR THE MUGGLES' OWN GOOD — this, I think, is the crucial point. Yes, we have been given power and yes, that power gives us the right to rule, but it also gives us responsibilities over the ruled. We must stress this point, it will be the foundation stone upon which we build. Where we are opposed, as we surely will be, this must be the basis of all our

counterarguments. We seize control FOR THE GREATER GOOD. And from this it follows that where we meet resistance, we must use only the force that is necessary and no more. (This was your mistake at Durmstrang! But I do not complain, because if you had not been expelled, we would never have met.)

Albus

Astonished and appalled though his many admirers will be, this letter constitutes proof that Albus Dumbledore once dreamed of overthrowing the Statute of Secrecy and establishing Wizard rule over Muggles. What a blow for those who have always portrayed Dumbledore as the Muggle-borns' greatest champion! How hollow those speeches promoting Muggle rights seem in the light of this damning new evidence! How despicable does Albus Dumbledore appear, busy plotting his rise to power when he should have been mourning his mother and caring for his sister!

No doubt those determined to keep Dumbledore on his crumbling pedestal will bleat that he did not, after all, put his plans into action, that he must have suffered a change of heart, that he came to his senses. However, the truth seems altogether more shocking.

Barely two months into their great new friendship, Dumbledore and Grindelwald parted, never to see each other again until they met for their legendary duel (for more, see chapter 22). What caused this abrupt rupture? *Had* Dumbledore come to his senses? Had he told Grindelwald he wanted no more part in his plans? Alas, no.

"It was poor little Ariana dying, I think, that did it," says Bathilda. "It came as an awful shock. Gellert was there in the house when it happened, and he came back to my house all of a dither, told me he wanted to go home the next day. Terribly distressed, you know. So I arranged a Portkey and that was the last I saw of him.

"Albus was beside himself at Ariana's death. It was so dreadful for those two brothers. They had lost everybody except each other. No wonder tempers ran a little high. Aberforth blamed Albus, you know, as

people will under these dreadful circumstances. But Aberforth always talked a little madly, poor boy. All the same, breaking Albus's nose at the funeral was not decent. It would have destroyed Kendra to see her sons fighting like that, across her daughter's body. A shame Gellert could not have stayed for the funeral. . . . He would have been a comfort to Albus, at least. . . ."

This dreadful coffin-side brawl, known only to those few who attended Ariana Dumbledore's funeral, raises several questions. Why exactly did Aberforth Dumbledore blame Albus for his sister's death? Was it, as "Batty" pretends, a mere effusion of grief? Or could there have been some more concrete reason for his fury? Grindelwald, expelled from Durmstrang for near-fatal attacks upon fellow students, fled the country hours after the girl's death, and Albus (out of shame or fear?) never saw him again, not until forced to do so by the pleas of the Wizarding world.

Neither Dumbledore nor Grindelwald ever seems to have referred to this brief boyhood friendship in later life. However, there can be no doubt that Dumbledore delayed, for some five years of turmoil, fatalities, and disappearances, his attack upon Gellert Grindelwald. Was it lingering affection for the man or fear of exposure as his once best friend that caused Dumbledore to hesitate? Was it only reluctantly that Dumbledore set out to capture the man he was once so delighted he had met?

And how did the mysterious Ariana die? Was she the inadvertent victim of some Dark rite? Did she stumble across something she ought not to have done, as the two young men sat practicing for their attempt at glory and domination? Is it possible that Ariana Dumbledore was the first person to die "for the greater good"?

The chapter ended here and Harry looked up. Hermione had reached the bottom of the page before him. She tugged the book out of Harry's hands, looking a little alarmed by his expression, and closed it without looking at it, as though hiding something indecent.

“Harry —”

But he shook his head. Some inner certainty had crashed down inside him; it was exactly as he had felt after Ron left. He had trusted Dumbledore, believed him the embodiment of goodness and wisdom. All was ashes: How much more could he lose? Ron, Dumbledore, the phoenix wand . . .

“Harry.” She seemed to have heard his thoughts. “Listen to me. It — it doesn’t make very nice reading —”

“Yeah, you could say that —”

“— but don’t forget, Harry, this is Rita Skeeter writing.”

“You did read that letter to Grindelwald, didn’t you?”

“Yes, I — I did.” She hesitated, looking upset, cradling her tea in her cold hands. “I think that’s the worst bit. I know Bathilda thought it was all just talk, but ‘For the Greater Good’ became Grindelwald’s slogan, his justification for all the atrocities he committed later. And . . . from that . . . it looks like Dumbledore gave him the idea. They say ‘For the Greater Good’ was even carved over the entrance to Nurmengard.”

“What’s Nurmengard?”

“The prison Grindelwald had built to hold his opponents. He ended up in there himself, once Dumbledore had caught him. Anyway, it’s — it’s an awful thought that Dumbledore’s ideas helped Grindelwald rise to power. But on the other hand, even Rita can’t pretend that they knew each other for more than a few months one summer when they were both really young, and —”

“I thought you’d say that,” said Harry. He did not want to let his anger spill out at her, but it was hard to keep his voice steady. “I thought you’d say ‘They were young.’ They were the same age as we are now. And here we are, risking our lives to fight the Dark Arts, and there he was, in a huddle with his new best friend, plotting their rise to power over the Muggles.”

His temper would not remain in check much longer: He stood up and walked around, trying to work some of it off.

“I’m not trying to defend what Dumbledore wrote,” said Hermione. “All

that ‘right to rule’ rubbish, it’s ‘Magic Is Might’ all over again. But Harry, his mother had just died, he was stuck alone in the house —”

“Alone? He wasn’t alone! He had his brother and sister for company, his Squib sister he was keeping locked up —”

“I don’t believe it,” said Hermione. She stood up too. “Whatever was wrong with that girl, I don’t think she was a Squib. The Dumbledore we knew would never, ever have allowed —”

“The Dumbledore we thought we knew didn’t want to conquer Muggles by force!” Harry shouted, his voice echoing across the empty hilltop, and several blackbirds rose into the air, squawking and spiraling against the pearly sky.

“He changed, Harry, he changed! It’s as simple as that! Maybe he did believe these things when he was seventeen, but the whole of the rest of his life was devoted to fighting the Dark Arts! Dumbledore was the one who stopped Grindelwald, the one who always voted for Muggle protection and Muggle-born rights, who fought You-Know-Who from the start, and who died trying to bring him down!”

Rita’s book lay on the ground between them, so that the face of Albus Dumbledore smiled dolefully at both.

“Harry, I’m sorry, but I think the real reason you’re so angry is that Dumbledore never told you any of this himself.”

“Maybe I am!” Harry bellowed, and he flung his arms over his head, hardly knowing whether he was trying to hold in his anger or protect himself from the weight of his own disillusionment. “Look what he asked from me, Hermione! Risk your life, Harry! And again! And again! And don’t expect me to explain everything, just trust me blindly, trust that I know what I’m doing, trust me even though I don’t trust you! Never the whole truth! Never!”

His voice cracked with the strain, and they stood looking at each other in the whiteness and the emptiness, and Harry felt they were as insignificant as insects beneath that wide sky.

“He loved you,” Hermione whispered. “I know he loved you.”

Harry dropped his arms.

“I don’t know who he loved, Hermione, but it was never me. This isn’t love, the mess he’s left me in. He shared a damn sight more of what he was really thinking with Gellert Grindelwald than he ever shared with me.”

Harry picked up Hermione’s wand, which he had dropped in the snow, and sat back down in the entrance of the tent.

“Thanks for the tea. I’ll finish the watch. You get back in the warm.”

She hesitated, but recognized the dismissal. She picked up the book and then walked back past him into the tent, but as she did so, she brushed the top of his head lightly with her hand. He closed his eyes at her touch, and hated himself for wishing that what she said was true: that Dumbledore had really cared.